

FORESTRY

B.C.'S

Devastated
Industry

Its Rehabilitation

By
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FIVE CENTS

Colin Cameron

Forestry . . . B.C.'s Devastated Industry

A Frank Discussion by
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Forestry - B.C.'s Devastated Industry

WHEN Captain John Meares set sail in 1787 from China, bound for the West Coast of North America, he carried instructions from his owners to load not only furs, the primary object of his voyage, but also "spars and sawn planks" from the virgin forests of Vancouver Island.

The exploitation of the natural wealth of British Columbia had begun! Civilized man, the insatiable, had broken into a new larder of potential wealth.

But it was not until 1849 that the first sawmill on this Coast was established; situated on the millstream near the present City of Victoria. In October, 1850, the first export cargo of manufactured lumber left these shores, consigned to the San Francisco of the "Forty-niners"—who paid a price of \$80 per thousand. Ten years later, the infant industry received an added stimulus from the demands created by the American Civil War. Mills were established during the early years of that war at Alberni, at Moodyville, and on the south shore of Burrard Inlet, where the settlement surrounding the Hastings Sawmill was destined to become the third city of Canada and the Dominion's chief Pacific port.

MODERN PRODUCTION.

The lumber industry has travelled a long way since those days of windjammers and ox-logging. An ever-

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increasing tempo of production and a continuous development of machine-power, has resulted in the stream of lumber production increasing to the point where, in 1940, the forests of B.C. threw on the markets of the world 3,693,154,756 board feet of timber products.

Wartime regulations prohibit the publication of export figures, but it will be sufficient to say that returns from forest products far surpass those from any other industry in British Columbia.

The lumber industry still remains the most important economic factor in the lives of B.C. citizens.

What has been the price that those citizens have had to pay for this gigantic development in production? For, of course, there has been a price. The old adage of "nothing for nothing and damn little for sixpence," holds good in the development of primary industries as in everything else. That terrible price may be learned by anyone who cares to take a trip through the "devastated areas" of our major industry.

The Forest Branch estimates that last year an area of 60,000 acres was cut-over in the Vancouver Forest District, which comprises Vancouver Island and the adjacent Mainland. It has been to date our most important forest area as it is the source of our most valuable and most easily marketable species, Douglas fir. Almost half of the total cut of over 3½ billion feet in 1940 was Douglas fir and in value it accounted for more than half of our lumber exports.

VAST DESTRUCTION.

The area cut-over in this district, 60,000 acres per annum, would not in itself be so important, were it not for the condition in which the cut-over lands are left. The late Mr. Manning, Chief Forester, reported that, at a very conservative estimate, 52 per cent of our cut-over lands were being left in a barren and unproductive condition. Within the last year or two this situation has improved to some extent by the re-afforestation program of the Forest Branch.

This is, however, in a large measure, a program designed to repair the damage rather than a policy designed to minimize the damage from the outset.

There are several factors contributing to the present rather gloomy outlook for the Douglas fir belt. One of these is the rapidity with which forest-lands are cut-over. Douglas fir seed travels a shorter distance than the seed of any other of our trees, and, in the course of one season's operations with modern equipment, areas are cut-over which cannot be re-seeded from the standing timber at the edge of the tract.

This, in itself, might not be so serious were it not that these huge areas of slash constitute a dangerous fire-hazard and it is necessary to dispose of the slash by fire.

This results in nearly all cases in the complete destruction of young trees and the major portion of any seed in the ground.

TOPSOIL DESTROYED.

From a silvicultural and soil-fertility point of view, this slash burning is indefensible. In many cases it does irreparable damage to the top-soil. It also results in the destruction of the waste materials, tops, limbs and small and broken timber which are a potential source of humus if allowed to decay. However, with our present methods of logging, this disposal of slash is a necessity if we are to avoid disastrous fires.

There are, of course, logging practices which are ideal if considered entirely from a technical point of view and without considering the economic aspects. There are other practices in vogue today which are ideal, when considered purely from a financial standpoint. They give the largest possible immediate returns on invested capital.

It should be possible to establish a mean—a system of operations which would on the one hand provide certain returns on invested capital and on the other hand ensure a certain permanence in our major industry and at the very least slow-down considerably the process by which our fund of forest wealth is being depleted.

PROVINCIAL FORESTS.

The Provincial Government has set aside large areas of forest lands as "provincial forests." On some of these areas logging rights have been granted under

certain "selective logging" regulations. It would seem that the time has come for much more extensive experiments.

These should be designed to demonstrate how closely we can approach to ideal logging methods, such as strip or block logging, leaving slash to decay, and logging selectively, without stepping outside the boundaries of economic practicability.

In carrying out these experiments, we shall have to consider not only the problems of the forest industry; we must also examine the effects of various forest exploitation on water run-off in streams and rivers and their consequent effect on the fishing industry.

TENNESSEE VALLEY.

In the United States, the now-famous Tennessee Valley project has afforded valuable object lessons, not only in forestry practices, control of soil erosion, control of floods and development of hydro-electric power, but also has demonstrated how each has its bearing on the others and how all of them affect the social and economic life of the people.

In studying the TVA, one is struck by the fact that what began as an engineering problem—the control of floods in the Mississippi valley—with incidental development of hydro-electric power, step by step spread and extended until now it affects the entire social and

economic life of a territory as large as many of the states of pre-war Europe.

The TVA quickly discovered that in order to pre-serve their flood-control and hydro-electric dams from silting up they had to embark on a program of re-afforesting those parts of the water-sheds which had been logged-off and left in a similar condition to those of British Columbia.

In addition, they soon found that soil erosion on the agricultural lands in the water-shed was a serious menace to their projects. Nothing short of a complete revolution in agricultural practices was called for and nothing less than that has been accomplished. Their problem was rendered all the more acute by the fact that long-continued poverty and lack of education had rendered the local farming community extremely im-pervious to new ideas.

GREAT SOCIAL SCHEME.

The Tennessee Valley Authority tackled the prob-lem from the individual up. They inaugurated an edu-cational campaign to persuade the farmers of the de-sirability of abandoning their traditional one-crop, soil-wasting practices.

To provide the economic basis for a change, the TVA supplied, with the education, cheap power for the farm, they commenced the manufacture of arti-ficial fertilizer and they gave part-time employment to small farmers on the various projects of the Authority.

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What began as an engineering project has de-veloped into the most significant social experiment in North America—an experiment which may prove to have played a more important part in the development of a new order of society than all the books and all the speeches in the socialist arsenal.

In an area, which a few short years ago was given over to an ever-increasing poverty amid an ever-in-creasing depletion of natural resources, there are now stable communities with adequate health and educa-tional services, based firmly on the economic use of a fund of natural wealth which is increasing with wise development instead of disappearing under the drive of senseless exploitation. Is there a lesson here for British Columbia?

It would be foolish to suggest that B.C. has yet reached the state of social and economic ruin which faced the TVA in the valley of the Tennessee River.

Nor would it be reasonable to suggest that the peo-ple of B.C. could embark on the ambitious program financed by the U.S. Government. But our problems here are of the same order if not of the same magni-tude and are capable of solution by similar if more modest projects.

FROM TVA TO B.C.

It may well be that the division of the province into development areas under the same sort of com-petent technical and socially-conscious management as

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the TVA should be the first step in initiating a program to utilize our natural wealth for the happiness and security of the citizens of B.C. Power development schemes, linked with forestry and agriculture, serving and served by secondary industries for the production of consumers' goods in each of these development areas, would go far toward developing in this province a balanced economy which could assure some measure of security.

At the present, British Columbia lives on the production of primary industries shipped to the markets of the world. The precarious nature of this type of economy has been amply demonstrated in the years before the war.

Trade delegations to "Timbuctoo" and sales campaigns in South America will not provide the solid security of an economy, producing socially-owned goods and services here in B.C.

PROVINCIAL PLANNING.

It is impossible to separate one industry, even a major industry like logging, from the rest of the economic picture when we plan its rehabilitation. We must consider not only the productive capacity of our forests but also our domestic requirements of the various types of forest products such as lumber, poles, ties, wood-pulp products, and veneer.

Then we must consider our requirements in other types of consumer goods, and decide which is the most economical and desirable method of procuring them—manufacturing them ourselves or exchanging forest products for them or for some of them.

There is no gain to us in tearing our forests to pieces in order to exchange them for things we could produce just as easily at home. In approaching the question of how much lumber it is desirable to produce, we must be governed entirely by our needs. We must cut enough to supply our own needs plus an amount sufficient to purchase whatever portion of our imports can best be obtained by the export of forest products. It is necessary, for instance, to import large quantities of grain and it would be uneconomical to attempt at present the production of grain on a large scale in B.C. The grain-growing provinces, on the other hand, require large quantities of lumber. An exchange of commodities is clearly beneficial to both sections. Tropical and sub-tropical products are another necessary item on our import list and a certain proportion of our lumber cut must be assigned to paying for them. To cut any more than is necessary to meet these requirements is needlessly to reduce our store of natural wealth and must result in a dead loss to the citizens of the province. This is true even though the process may be personally profitable to the lumber operators and even though the wages distributed in the process provide, for the time being, a livelihood for a number of mill-hands and loggers.

COULD PRODUCE WITHIN.

At present a tremendous proportion of our forest cut goes to pay for a wide range of commodities which we could be producing within the province—and also, of course, to provide handsome profits for the fortunate owners of timber and production plants. If we can rid our minds of the idea that the primary purpose of industry is to provide jobs for the workers and profits for the operators, and grasp the idea that the sole function of all industry, as far as the ordinary citizen is concerned, is to produce, directly or indirectly, consumer goods and services, then we shall be able to plan the use of our natural wealth along sane and common-sense lines.

It will lay the foundation of a much more secure economy for B.C. if we begin now to develop a socially-owned industry to supply our domestic requirements of every commodity that can be economically produced here, rather than to continue to rely on the forests of the province to buy for us the cups and saucers, glass, boots and clothing we require.

In fact the time is rapidly approaching when we shall be obliged to do this if we want to continue drinking out of cups or have glass in our windows and shirts on our backs, for we are within sight of the end of the bank account on which we have been drawing such lavish cheques. Opposition to such a course will come from those who still have lumber to sell across the world. They will fear that if we no longer import cups and saucers, woollen pants and leather goods, they will not be able to sell their lumber. They will probably

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be quite right too, but it is not a matter that need cause any concern to the citizens of B.C. We are concerned only with the problems of turning our natural resources into usable commodities and getting them distributed to the people.

A socially-owned industry employing all employable citizens in the work of producing their needs, either directly by manufacture or indirectly by the production of goods for exchange with other parts of the world, will care for both these problems. We are certainly not concerned with preserving B.C. as a dumping ground for manufactured goods so that the fortunate owners of raw materials may continue to rifle the till of our natural wealth.

FOREST ECONOMY.

British Columbia has been conducting her affairs like an exiled Russian Grand Duchess who sells her jewels bit by bit to get the more prosaic but more useful necessities of life. And like the Grand Duchess we are rapidly getting down to the last necklace.

No matter what we do now—no matter how drastic a policy for forest economy we introduce, we have to face the fact that within ten or fifteen years our major industry will be reduced to a fraction of its present size. It is anyway probably useless to hope for any drastic curtailment of forest exploitation during the war. Apparently the demands of war are so great that for the time being we must maintain our present cut. But we must be prepared for the end of hostilities.

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We must then be in a position to begin husbanding our depleted resources. We can only do this if we have developed some other means of procuring the necessities of daily life. If we take steps during the war to test our potentialities in the way of production of consumer goods and are all ready to expand experimental projects into a comprehensive scheme of socially-owned production, then we shall be able to welcome home with an easy mind all those men who today believe they are enrolled in a fight for a new and better order of society.

END OF TIMBER BARONS.

Regarded from one angle the devastation of our forest lands has been the result of the necessity to obtain the wherewithal to purchase consumers' goods. This has placed an impossible economic burden on the forests of the province. Until we have removed some of this burden we shall not be in a position to experiment with new methods of conservation and production. Having removed this overload we shall still have to deal with the "sacred cow" of private property. No doubt those who now hold title to our natural resources will insist on continuing to do as they like with "their own." If they prove deaf to all considerations of decency and common-sense, as they all too often have in the past, then a CCF government will have to wield the weapon of taxation quite ruthlessly and solve once and for all the problem of the private ownership of natural resources.

There is no solution possible to the problem of preserving our major resources and industry unless private ownership of forest lands is abolished or unless the private owners are prepared to operate under the complete control and supervision of public officials in a comprehensive and integrated state scheme.

It rests with the lumber barons of B.C. which course will be followed—for there is one thing of which they may be very sure.

The man who left a logging camp or a sawmill for the army is not going to come home to wander meekly on Cordova Street, or to work for starvation wages, because the Lords of Timber still persist in maintaining the glories of "free enterprise" and discover, as they discovered before the war, that the markets of free enterprise no longer exist.

Our returned soldier this time is going to ask some very pointed questions if he is told that he must tighten his belt and go without because B.C.'s industrial overlords can no longer dispose of our natural wealth at a profit.

This pamphlet has tried to indicate what answer the CCF proposes to give him. What answer have the timber barons in mind? It had better be good.



